

**Ms. McCollum of Minnesota:** Madam Chair, I rise to support the College Opportunity and Affordability Act and I commend Chairman Miller and Ranking Member McKeon for putting together a bipartisan bill that will have a real impact on college affordability.

I had the honor to serve on the Education and Workforce Committee for my first 6 years in Congress. It is a real pleasure to know that we will finally be able to reauthorize the Higher Education Act.

The College Opportunity and Affordability Act is focused on students, strengthening higher education, and improving our global competitiveness.

It increases need based aid, provides more access to information on the cost of college, and holds states accountable for their investment. It protects borrowers

by restoring sunshine to student loan programs, and by simplifying the financial aid application process. And, it also makes new investments in increasing student interest in science and technology careers.

I also want to thank Chairman Miller for including legislation that I introduced along with Congressman Bishop and Congressman Grijalva to crack down on diploma mills.

Diploma Mills – businesses that sell fraudulent degrees for little or no work – have proliferated in recent decades due to lax law enforcement and technological advances such as the internet and email.

The growth of these fraudulent businesses has created a variety of serious problems. Diploma mills can sell a worthless degree to a naïve student. They also threaten the reputation of American colleges and universities by blatantly using similar names.

They cheat employers – including school districts as we saw a few years ago – and the federal government. A 2004 GAO study revealed that at least 463 federal employees held degrees from diploma mills and other unaccredited universities. I

In addition to hiring employees who are likely unqualified, employers, including the federal government, have wasted resources paying tuition to diploma mills.

They can be physically dangerous as is so obvious in the example of diploma mill medical schools. And more and more it is a national security issue. These degrees could be used to obtain visas. In addition, our failure to deal with the issue has been noted in other countries (Japan), harming our reputation around the world.

This legislation includes the first national effort to combat this problem. It is a first step but a very important step.

I thank the Chair and the Ranking Member for their support of this provision and for their dedication to improving access to higher education. I urge all my colleagues to support H.R. 4137 and to continue to make access to higher education a priority for this Congress.